

SOB SISTERS AND THE WAR.

BY CHARLES ALMA BYERS.

VERILY, the old order changeth. The day of the real war correspondent, the man of red blood and nerve and with a nose for battlefield news, has passed. In the modern theaters of war he has become a *persona non grata*, and therefore non-existent. And in his place—*vive feminism!*—has come the “sob sister.” It is indeed a cruel war which the world is experiencing.

If there were some modern Diogenes to prowl about with a lantern—or even modernly equipped with a searchlight—looking for the possible good accruing from the ill-wind which sweeps the world to-day, it is to be wondered if he would be more successful than was the original, christened Laertius, who sought for an honest man. In America, on whose door Opportunity has loudly rapped, he would find, it is true, that we have reaped millions of dollars from “humanity”-protected ammunition and have produced and nurtured some scores of “sob sisters.” But what else? And would he be satisfied with the discovery? For Diogenes, you know, was a skeptic.

The “sob sister” is a peculiar species of the *genus homo*—feminine in name but common in gender, and variously garbed in skirts or trousers. But although peculiar, she—let us call her such for want of a more adequate pronoun—is by no means a *rara avis*. Begat of the union of the much-common “sob sister” of the daily newspaper and the once-loved muck-raker of the magazine—as mother and father respectively—she, although perhaps more *blasé* than they, is as much a product of the war as are the “war babies” of Europe; and probably as numerous. And of course since she is a child of the war and her father is dead, we, to be consistent to sentiment, must nurture her well—God bless the dear!

Not to the battlefields does the “sob sister” flock; but safe and secure in boudoir or den or editorial sanctum annex, far from the

din and bullets of conflict, she supplants the old-time war correspondent with ease and grace and sweet presumptuousness, her facile typewriter—like the old mill that, on the ocean bed, ground out salt, salt, salt—grinding out words, words, words. Occasionally mayhap, she, like the vulture that hovers safely against the azure sky, will visit the third or thirteenth trench “at the front,” for a fleeting moment at still of night, or the capital of some country at war, and send thence her wail to the sentiment-and-atrocity hungering world. But not for facts does she venture thither; instead, it is merely for “local color” and the essential prestige—if the latter be otherwise lacking.

She prejudiced? Ah, not necessarily; just human—avaricious. She caters to that market which rewards in dollars. The market itself may be prejudiced—may hunger for English-flavored sobs and universal German condemnation; but little cares she. For a jitney a word, she stands ready to herald any one who steals a loaf of bread as a Jean Valjean, or any Cavell as a Jeanne D’Arc. She might have even deigned to make heroines of Margarete Schmitt and Otilie Moss, executed in France for espionage, had a lucrative American market for German heroines existed. Hence—for an American press, English-prejudiced or English-subsidized—she, with a magnifying glass, explores the stars of the *Entente* firmament, soberly analyzing their divine luster and their beneficent brilliancy, and the meanwhile, under the small end of a telescope, she likewise soberly dissects the *Kultur* of the Teutons, kindly laying bare before our long-unseeing eyes its coarseness, its barbarity, its *et cetera ad infinitum*.

And besides undertaking to supplant the war correspondent, ’tis feared she imagines she is writing history! Does she? I wonder. Could one be really certain, one might be tempted to back-track over her dollar-paved trail, to reconsider her well-worn themes and present rebuttal. But why be ungallant—embarrassing? Moreover, why should one, by becoming analytical, court the stigma of propagandist? A propagandist, you know, must necessarily possess a German leaning, and is therefore a criminal. Then, too, there is that branding iron called the “hyphen”—contaminating if German—to be feared and shunned.

While no prize-fighter, college president, or other laurel-crowned person is necessarily debarred from the ranks, if his or her name be of the *n*th power, the fiction writer, of course, makes the best loved “sob sister” of all. She is so excellently qualified. Witness, for instance, the number of fictionists, both imported and domestic,

who have joined the sisterhood, and thereby become such valued authorities on the European war—its causes and its effects, its crimes and its glories, its barbarians and its heroes. But the name's the thing—the entering wedge. It was not sophisticated Shakespeare who asked: "What's in a name?" It was love-blind, love-loony Romeo; and Romeo was not an editor.

But enough by way of preamble. "Preparedness" is the issue of the day in America. And why not? Let us forget "militarism," since "militarism" can be a crime only when fostered by Germans. And in "preparedness" let us not forget the "sob sister." It perhaps is important, to an extent, that we possess a few battleships and be able to mobilize some soldiers, but most important of all is a country's ability to mobilize a goodly quota of untiring "sob sisters." They, as a sort of press agent, subsidized or otherwise, can right all wrongs and wrong all rights, and, above all, recruit "flunkies" at will. If any one has made the pen mightier than the sword it is they. Therefore, let us be ever worshipful.